

More than just a face in the crowd

Tracy overcomes cancer, keeps positive outlook

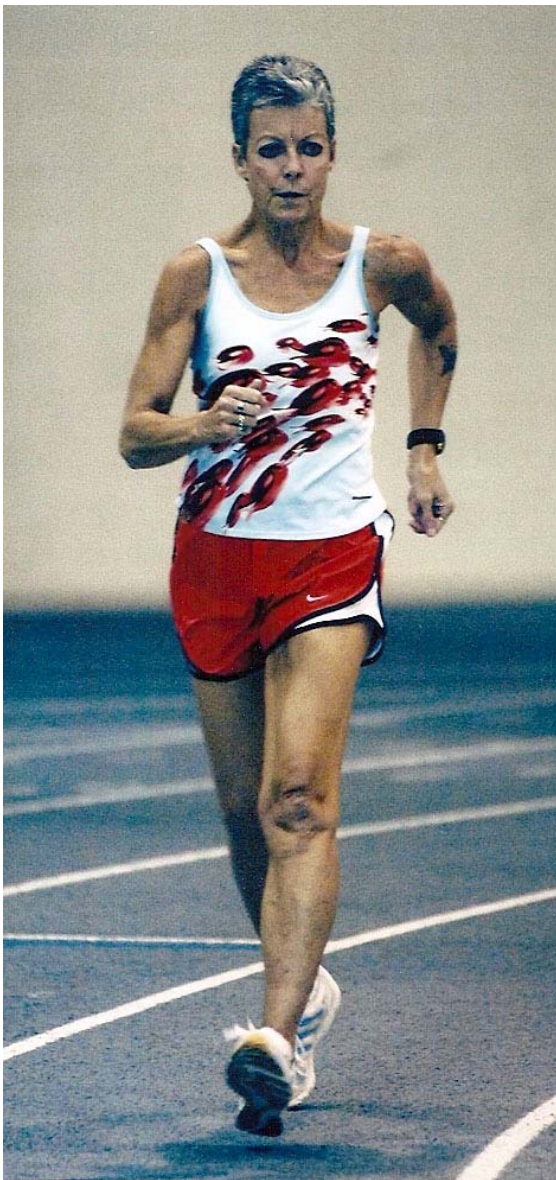
By Robb Luehr

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RACINE — With all the success Lynn Tracy of Racine has had as a race walker, none compares to her latest victory.

Beating breast cancer.

Last November, Tracy, one of the top Masters race walkers in the nation, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had a single mastectomy and had a few lymph nodes removed, but didn't have to undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatment. Eleven months later, Tracy said she is cancer-free.



Race walker Lynn Tracy trains Wednesday at UW-Parkside. Tracy, a world-class race walker who was recently featured in Sports Illustrated's Faces in the Crowd, is back walking after beating breast cancer. Photo by Gregory Shaver Journal Times.

Tracy, who trains with the UW-Parkside Athletic Club and is coached by Mike DeWitt, approached her cancer the same way she has approached other health issues in her life — with determination. "There's life after breast cancer," said Tracy, who turned 55 July 16. "When you get cancer, what are you going to do? You deal with it and move on. The doctor said he could do a lumpectomy and I could have radiation, but it was too big a chunk of my time.

"People come up to me and they have no idea. I'm not shy about it and I feel I can provide support for others who go through things like breast cancer. When anybody wants to talk about it, I discuss it. I don't let things stop me. Life is too precious."

It certainly is for Tracy, who has been race walking for nearly 18 years. In fact, she had one thing on her mind after the surgery.

"All I could think about was how soon I could get back to race walking," Tracy said. "I just wanted to try to get back into condition. I'm sure what cancer did to my body, but I felt great."

She felt so good after the surgery, she started lifting weights — before her doctor cleared her to do so — and did a race walk at Parkside in December.

After she got back in race shape, which she said took just a couple of months, Tracy, a professional dog trainer, started competing at her old level again. After setting numerous records in the 50-54 age group, Tracy has pretty much taken over the 55-59 division — at least this summer and fall.

Tracy hit her stride Aug. 2-5 at the USA Track and Field Masters Championships at Orono, Maine, when she won both the 5K and 10K races in her new age group.

In the 5k, competing in nearly 90-degree weather with a track temperature of 110, she finished second overall among women in 28:57.29. In the 10k the following day, walking in a more comfortable 65 degrees, she finished in 58:27.65.

At the Wisconsin Senior Olympics Sept. 15, she blew away the old record of 10:32 in the 1,500-meter race walk in her age group, finishing in 7:48.35. She won the women's race by nearly four minutes and also beat the top 55-59 male by a minute and a half.

On Oct. 6, to cap off the season, she won her third straight age-group U.S. women's 5K race walk title and first title in the 55-59 group, finishing in 28:00 to set an American record for that age group.

Since Tracy was in her 20s, she's had her digestive system resected three times due to chronic ulcer disease. She's also had surgery for three hernias and in 1995 had a hysterectomy.

Not many people outside the Parkside Athletic Club knew about Tracy's cancer, but Tracy figures they have their own theory of what keeps her going.

"They say I keep getting faster because I keep having body parts removed," Tracy said with a big laugh. "Every time I come back from surgery, the guys say I went to have another part taken off."

Tracy's recent successes haven't gone unnoticed. Bill Baxter of the Parkside Athletic Club told Tracy last month he nominated her to be in Sports Illustrated's weekly feature, Faces in the Crowd.

"When he told me he was putting me in, I just rolled my eyes," Tracy said. "I thought it would be really cool, but I doubted it was going to happen."

But there she was in the Oct. 8 issue, her smiling face in the pages of the nation's top sports magazine.

"(Sports Illustrated) called me up four or five days later and they needed a photo. They told me if I didn't have one, they'd send out their own photographer." Tracy said. "I was thrilled. I can't believe it. I was elated."

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